

Together HALF DAY ON \$50

BY BRIAN BUTTON PHOTOS BY TY SMEDES



Kentucky warbler

ADD TO YOUR BIRDING LIST IN LUCAS COUNTY AND SUPPORT ECO-TOURISM

Head to one of Iowa's premier birding venues rich in expansive tracts of forest, pockets of tallgrass prairie and loads of bird species—more than 240 to be exact. There's no better way to expand your personal bird checkoff list than attending the first Big Day of Birding event in Lucas County while exploring local camping and sights, too. It's free and everyone from true beginners to lifelong birders will learn tips and skills from experts.

Stephens State Forest already holds some of the largest varieties

of woodland birds in Iowa, especially migrating warblers—those colorful “jewels of the forest” that attract birders from across the state and nation.

The area is so good it boasts two DNR-designated Bird Conservation Areas—also listed as Important Bird Areas under a worldwide program through Great Britain-based Birdlife International.

With three days of activities planned, attendees can spend as much or as little time birding as they wish. For those that have just a few hours, come anytime

Saturday, May 21 (some will start as early as 5 a.m.) to get plugged into a bird team when you arrive. Teams canvas the countryside to identify as many species as they can. It is hoped some previously undocumented species will be discovered. Guides will lead walks and help beginners learn identification tricks.

For those with more time, start at 7 p.m., Friday, May 20 learning about the Big Day of Birding at the Pin Oak Nature Lodge just south of Chariton. The evening includes a film. Then early on Saturday, teams leave the lodge, and continuing into

Hooded warbler



Birding Rendezvous Locale:

PIN OAK MARSH LODGE

Lucas County Conservation Board
45996 Highway 14
(One mile south of Chariton.)
641-774-2438

Area Lodging

RED HAW STATE PARK is one mile east of Chariton on Highway 34 with reservable campsites. Beautiful lake, fishing, trails and more. Reserve at **1-877-IAPARKS** or **iowadnr.gov**.

HONEY CREEK RESORT STATE PARK is 30 miles southeast of Chariton. For room or cabin reservations, call **877-677-3344** or **honeycreekresort.com**.

STEPHENS STATE FOREST offers non-modern campsites for \$9 per night. Reserve at **1-877-IAPARKS** or **iowadnr.gov**.

Local Amenities and Attractions

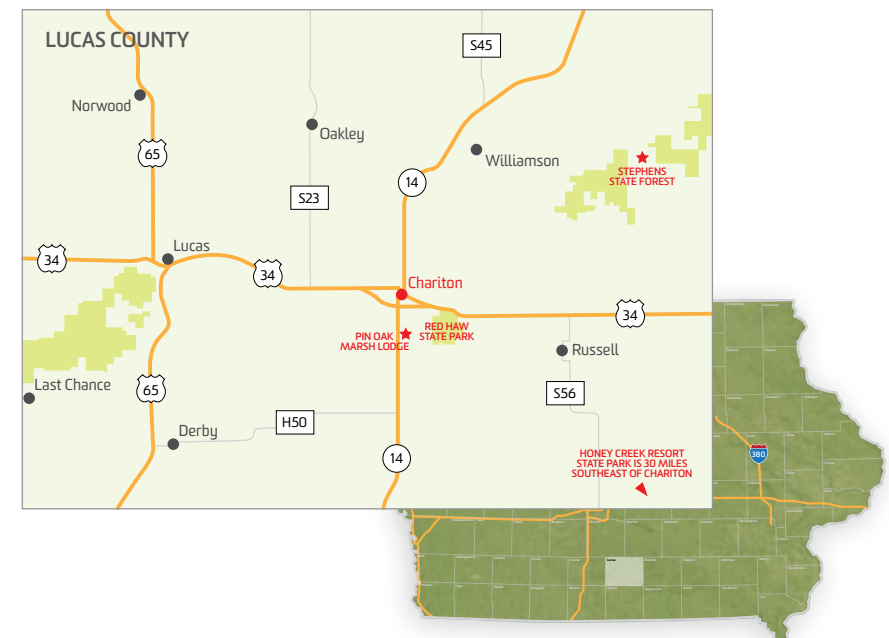
From famous handmade candies to custom motorcycles or Amish tours, Lucas County has surprises. For details on lodging, food and attractions in Chariton, call the chamber at **641-774-4059** or visit **charitonareachambermainstreet.com**

GET HELP TO LAUNCH YOUR PROGRAM

A REAP community education mini-grant is helping Lucas County launch their first Big Day of Birding. The leveraged funds help projects with measureable results that engage Iowans in natural resources, benefitting Iowa's environment and citizens. Grant deadlines are May 15 and Nov. 1. Learn more at **iowadnr.gov/reap**.

DID YOU KNOW?

Birding is one of the most popular outdoor activities nationwide, with an estimated 44 million participants. Birding has more participants nationally than golf and attracts many wildlife enthusiasts in Iowa, too, shows survey data by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. More than 165,000 Iowans took trips away from home specifically to watch birds.



evening, explore the county to search out species. Teams turn in their lists Saturday night, and by Sunday morning, final tallies are presented.

The event promises to not only promote birding to families and individuals with limited birding skills, but for expert birders to share their skills with each other. And your visit helps promote natural area protection and expansion.

County leaders are hosting the event to learn more about local bird species and promote sustainable eco-tourism,

with longer goals of creating local conservation support and more bird habitat over time.

“We recognize our local natural areas are a draw. Lucas County should be a birding destination,” says county tourism chair and former DNR interim-director Lyle Asell. “This event will give us a snapshot of what species are here on a given day,” he says.

And with great turnout and local support, organizers hope to grow the event into an annual festival, while encouraging local residents,

towns and landowners to further the eco-tourism cause with bird-friendly habitat improvements and conservation awareness.

Free T-Shirt for Registrants

Register in advance for the no-cost event and receive a free t-shirt. Some birding materials, such as binoculars, guide books and other supplies provided, but if you have your own, bring them. To register, contact Kris Patrick at **641-774-4059** or **charitonchamber@iowatelecom.net**.